

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-909a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Kensington Branch of the Philadelphia YWCA
other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number 174 W. Allegheny Avenue N/A not for publication
city, town Philadelphia N/A vicinity
state Pennsylvania code 101 county philadelphia code 101 zip code 19134

3. Classification

Ownership of Property

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

| Contributing | Noncontributing |
|--------------|-----------------|
| <u>1</u> | <u>0</u> |
| | buildings |
| | sites |
| | structures |
| | objects |
| <u>1</u> | <u>0</u> Total |

Name of related multiple property listing:
N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Signature of certifying official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register. See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register. See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain): _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Social - Civic

Domestic - Institutional Housing

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Vacant

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(enter categories from instructions)

Colonial Revival

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Stone

walls Brick

Terra Cotta

roof Asphalt

other _____

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

In the midst of the industrial landscape of Philadelphia's Kensington is the handsome Colonial Revival headquarters of the Young Women's Christian Association. Built in the economical brick with terra cotta trim that typified Philadelphia charitable architecture of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Kensington Branch of the YWCA rivals the nearby mills in scale and character. On the first floor, the plan provided a gracious social center for the community with a grand lobby, a restaurant, and athletic facilities that served as a focus of the recreation and training; upper floors held meeting and classroom spaces, and the top three stories provided modest rooms for boarders.(Fig. 1) These different functions are reflected on the main facade by horizontal subdivisions. Less obvious is the building's development over time. The western three story portion was erected first, as the Hoffman Memorial wing, while the main block and swimming pool were added four years after completion of the first portion, in time for the celebration of the American YWCA's fiftieth anniversary in 1916.(Fig. 2)

The Hoffman Memorial wing was erected in 1911, to carry on the original purpose of the Kensington Branch, which had been founded in 1891 to provide classroom space for the young women of the Kensington work force. The decision to move west to the Hancock and Allegheny Avenue site put the YWCA into the center of the garment district. To attract new members a cafeteria was made the chief feature of the first floor, while the upper two levels housed classes on dressmaking and millinery which were the staples of the Kensington branch program. The marble framed entrance was added as a grace note to the austere brick facade, and opened into a vestibule providing access to a large dining hall. This is ornamented on the east side by a fireplace framed by an oak mantle articulated by panels. Large consoles support the mantle shelf. This was no doubt intended to give the room some grandeur, emphasizing the social space that would cause those who had come for an inexpensive meal to return for the various classes and activities. The upper levels of the Hoffman wing are reached by a simple stair with a paneled oak newel.

The siting of the Hoffman Memorial wing in the center of the block suggests that the ultimate size of the existing building, reaching to the corner of Hancock Street, was intended from the beginning. The eastern portion of the facade of the earlier building was stepped back so that the new portion would be seen as a separate and monumental symmetrical volume, flanked by similar

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Description: (continued)

though not identical side wings.(Fig. 3) The second building phase, which like the first was of brick with a central marble framed door, continued the motifs established in the 1911 wing.(Fig. 4) Two story segmentally arched openings define the bays of the steel frame and are set off by a terra cotta cornice above the second story, suggesting the grand two story first floor lobby and gymnasium. This portion of the building is flanked on the east by a one story side wing that housed a basement swimming pool, and was lighted above an indoor track on the balcony by windows at the first floor. On the east, the upper levels of the building were indented above the second floor to provide a light well, and were articulated by domestically scaled six over six windows which denote the rooms for the boarders on floors four through six. A modest cornice above a decorative brick frieze caps the facade.

If the exterior (apart from its marble entrances and modest cornices) drew on the vocabulary and massing of the nearby mills, the interior spaces were intended, like those of the original wing, to invite further interest. Central to that purpose is the main lobby, a two story space which spans the front of the 1915 block, linking the Hoffman Memorial wing and a smaller lobby in the pool building. Fluted plaster-clad steel piers, supporting a balcony at mid level, carry panel covered steel beams.(Fig. 5) The room focussed on the east end on a large fireplace, and on a grand stair across from the entrance.(Fig. 6) Repeating a motif from their recently completed Bellevue Stratford Hotel, the architects brought the balcony into close proximity with the pier capitals, enlivening the spatial experience of the balcony by the scale of the plaster ornament.(Fig. 7) Dark oak frames the doors, and was used for the balcony railing and panels the small peripheral spaces of the main room. The lobby floor is covered with a dark red tile that continues into the side wing, which contains a solarium on the front and the pool at the rear. A handsome brick fireplace with arts and crafts brickwork enlivens the solarium.(Fig. 8)

The simplicity of the athletic spaces contrasts appropriately with the public zones. The gymnasium is plastered, with only the location of the beams and columns interrupting the wall and ceiling plane. The swimming pool, which is of the modest size of early twentieth century facilities, is clad in tile, with the brick of the solarium continuing at the first floor.

Because the lobby and the gym are two stories in height, the second story is greatly reduced in circulation. A handsome public stair off the south side of the lobby leads to a simpler iron stair at the balcony. This in turn opens into the classrooms of the third floor. There large spaces, accented by

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fireplaces as a note of elegance, can be subdivided by paneled, hinged oak doors that slide on metal tracks, anticipating the folding partitions of modern institutional architecture, but recalling the operative partitions of Sam Sloan's Model School design of the 1850s.(Fig. 9) Throughout the public spaces, decorative fireplaces enliven the interiors.(Fig. 10) The upper levels are subdivided into small dormitory rooms, and the millwork in the corridors is the principal feature of interest.

Despite lessened use following mill closings after World War II, the Kensington branch of the YWCA survives essentially intact, with only modest alterations that typically mark the attempt to meet modern building codes. Added partitions separate portions of the balconies from the lobby; later heating systems have been intrusively run over fireplaces; interior finishes have been covered with plywood paneling. But the original facade is intact; the original sashes survive in the openings, and the decorative plasterwork of the lobby is complete. This landmark of Philadelphia philanthropy remains, in the midst of the community for which it was constructed three-quarters of a century ago.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Social History
Architecture

Period of Significance

1911-1939

Significant Dates

1911, 1915

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Hewitt, Granger and Paist

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The Kensington Branch of the Philadelphia YWCA was constructed early in the twentieth century as a means of extending the program and purposes of one of the most important agencies for social reform and education to the growing mill districts between Frankford and Kensington. Organized in 1891 at 2423 Frankford Avenue, the Kensington Branch emphasized dress-making and millinery skills which would be useful to the textile trade in the neighborhood. It also provided meals as well as day nursery services to working mothers. The Allegheny Avenue building was constructed in response to the success of the program, and was shortly expanded to enable the branch to house young women and to provide recreational facilities which were rare in a working class community. The building was the design of the important architectural firm established by George W. and William D. Hewitt in the 1870s, which had undertaken many of the region's most important buildings, including the Bourse, the Bellevue Stratford Hotel, and locally, buildings at the Episcopal Hospital on Lehigh Avenue, and the Lehigh Avenue branch of the Free Library. Their design for the YWCA shows characteristic features of the contemporary modified Georgian classicism, but retained the color of the firm's earlier Victorian design, as if to fit in with the industrial setting. Well preserved, the YWCA is the chief landmark of its neighborhood.

The social changes that caused the American Young Women's Christian Association to be established first appeared in the industrial cities of England, where conventional morality offered social services to substitute for family and church for displaced rural youths who had come to industrial centers seeking work. The Salvation Army, and the Young Men's and Young Women's Christian associations were part of the solution which Victorian England and later the United States offered.¹ By 1866, the movement had crossed the Atlantic to Boston, and four years later, it reached Philadelphia. Other social thinkers had prepared the way, notably Philadelphia's Sarah Josepha Hale, editor of Godey's Ladies Book, which had encouraged education, work training, and other goals of the women's movement. The YWCA offered a focus for those activities, and was well received in Philadelphia. Within a

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Significance: (continued)

generation it was successful enough to build a skyscraper headquarters at 18th and Arch Street (1892, Benjamin D. Price, demolished c.1970), and to reach out to other neighborhoods in Philadelphia. Independently, a second branch of the YWCA was established in Germantown, which occupied several buildings on Germantown Avenue, and which ran a mission in 1905 across from the Dobson Mills on Ridge Avenue.² That venture failed in 1928.

Kensington had developed for more than two centuries along the Delaware River as a working neighborhood centered on ship-building and the port. By the end of the nineteenth century, zones north and west of the old water front district were being incorporated as the textile industry spread along the railroads, the American Street north-south corridor, and the main lines of the Reading and Pennsylvania railroads, in the vicinity of Glenside Avenue. Drawing on the underemployed wives of the men in the heavy industry along the port, textile mills flourished with such landmarks as the Bromley Carpet Mills on east Lehigh Avenue five blocks to the south, and dozens of smaller mills that are scattered among the row houses of this industrial neighborhood.³

East Allegheny Avenue developed as an industrial district only after the neighboring regions, better served by railroads had filled to overflowing. Because this area was in between rail lines, it had remained largely vacant as late as 1900, when only six buildings had been constructed between Front and American streets on the east and west, and Indiana and Westmoreland on the north and south. Utilizing steam engines for power, and relying on road access to railroad terminals, these early mills served the textile industry, and typically formed a place of employment for the working women of the Kensington community to the east.⁴ The YWCA's Kensington Branch was successful because it was able to serve what was then a largely Protestant community which had developed almost without social institutions.⁵ The first attempted was a day care facility established in 1880. It was an idea ahead of its time, and the branch closed in 1882, but it was reorganized in 1891, in rented quarters on Frankford Avenue, where it focussed on education and recreation for the young factory workers.⁶ By 1897, the annual report indicated that 1600 young women were involved in programs out of their tiny building. In 1896, a gift of \$10.00 led to the establishment of a building fund, and in 1906, the 36th Annual Report of the Young Women's Christian Association of Philadelphia reported: "The following generous offer was made in February; that if the YWCA will purchase outright a lot of ground in Kensington, a gentleman, will erect thereon a memorial building suitable for their work, at an approximate cost of ten thousand dollars and present it to the organization."⁷ Five years later, Hewitt,

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Significance: (continued)

Granger and Paist, successors to the Hewitt Brothers, were commissioned to design the Hoffman wing, which was completed shortly thereafter.⁸

That first phase, which included a cafeteria and classrooms, justified the donor's faith, for it was soon serving 11,000 meals a month, and had enrolled 500 members, with a Mother's Club of 100 local women. Its success was such that Hewitt and Granger were asked to plan a larger building which would duplicate the facilities of the Central Y, with a dormitory residence and extensive athletic facilities.⁹ In a region of the city which presented few such opportunities, the Y was an immediate success. Its membership tripled; its cafeteria doubled in volume, and all of its boarding rooms were quickly filled.¹⁰ It was completed in time for the national celebration of the 50th anniversary of the American YWCA in January of 1916. The nominated building was used as a YWCA until 1970.

With the new building, the Kensington Branch could offer women the opportunity for self-sufficiency in "pleasant and convenient buildings, where they can offer to the toiling young women of our cities, the attractions of social relaxation, books, music, etc. and throw around them the protective and refining influences of a Christian home."¹¹ Following the idea of "cooperative living" rather than charity, the Y program of economical meals, reasonably priced rooms, active recreational and social programs and education directed towards employment proved enormously successful, and offered the well-to-do of the city the opportunity to improve the lives of those who were confronting the social consequences of industrialization. But, directed as it was by the well-to-do, the Y served as an instrument for socialization that was beneficial and important in working neighborhoods such as Kensington. It is worth noting that Y's were often provided by employers, as a benefit, but no doubt also as a means of instruction in employee values. Notable examples were the Pennsylvania Railroad Branch of the YMCA, and the modest North American Lace Company branch of the YWCA at 10th and Glenwood in the heart of the millinery district. Both of these have been abandoned, and the latter, like the main YWCA branch in center city, has been destroyed.

As the home of the Kensington Branch of the YWCA, a significant social organization that sought to ameliorate the impact of industrialization, thus contributing to the broad patterns of our history, and as a well-preserved building designed by an important architectural firm in the city's history, the Kensington Branch of the YWCA deserves to be placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

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Footnotes:

1. Mary Sims, The Natural History of the Young Women's Christian Association of the United States of America, New York, 1935 traces the antecedents in Britain, pp. 2-7.
2. Lucy Carner, The First One Hundred Years of the YWCA of Germantown, 1870-1970, Philadelphia, 1969, traces the history of that second Y and discusses its Falls of Schuylkill branch. pp. 17, 22.
3. The physiognomy of that development can be seen in G.W. Bromley and Co., Atlas of the City of Philadelphia, Philadelphia, 1901, pl. 14, 15, 16, and the G.W. Bromley Atlas of Philadelphia from Lehigh to Wingohocking, Philadelphia, 1925, pl. 13, 14.
4. Bromley, 1925, pl. 16.
5. Bromley, 1901, pl. 14, 15, 16.
6. The history of the Kensington Branch of the YWCA can be understood from three documents, the Annual Reports, published from 1896 following, which give a separate report on the Kensington Branch; Sarah Cadbury's "25 Year History of the YWCA of Philadelphia, 1870 - 1895," which was published in the 25th Annual Report of the YWCA, Philadelphia, 1897, pp. 1 - 9; and "Historical Background, Kensington Branch", unpublished ms. from the YWCA, c.1988. Most useful are the Annual Reports which provide statistical reports on the membership and users of the various programs.
7. 36th Annual Report, Philadelphia, 1907, p. 20.
8. PRER&BG XXVI:6 (8 Feb. 1911).
9. PRER&BG XXIX:8 (25 Feb. 1914).
10. "Historical Background", op cit. p. 1.
11. Sims, op. cit. p. 15.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Atlases:

Bromley, G.W. Atlas of the City of Philadelphia. Philadelphia, 1901.

----- Atlas of the City of Philadelphia, between Lehigh and Wingohocking. Philadelphia, 1925.

Institutional History:

Cadbury, Sarah. "25 Year History of the Philadelphia Branch of the YWCA, 1870 - 1895." 25th Annual Report of the YWCA. Philadelphia, 1896, pp. 1-11.

Carner, Lucy. The First 100 Years of the YWCA of Germantown, 1870 - 1970. Philadelphia, 1969.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of property 0.3 acres

UTM References

A 18 | 488650 | 4427390
 Zone Easting Northing

C _____ | _____ | _____

B _____ | _____ | _____
 Zone Easting Northing

D _____ | _____ | _____

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

Beginning at the southwest corner of Hancock Street and Allegheny Avenue, continue south 114 feet to Wishart Street, then west 129 feet to a point, then north 114 feet to Allegheny Avenue, then east to the point of origin.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

This is the entire site of the building.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title George E. Thomas, Ph.D.

organization Clio Group, Inc.

date 9-15-89

street & number 3512 Lancaster Avenue

telephone (215) 386-6276

city or town Philadelphia

state PA zip code _____

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Bibliography: (continued)

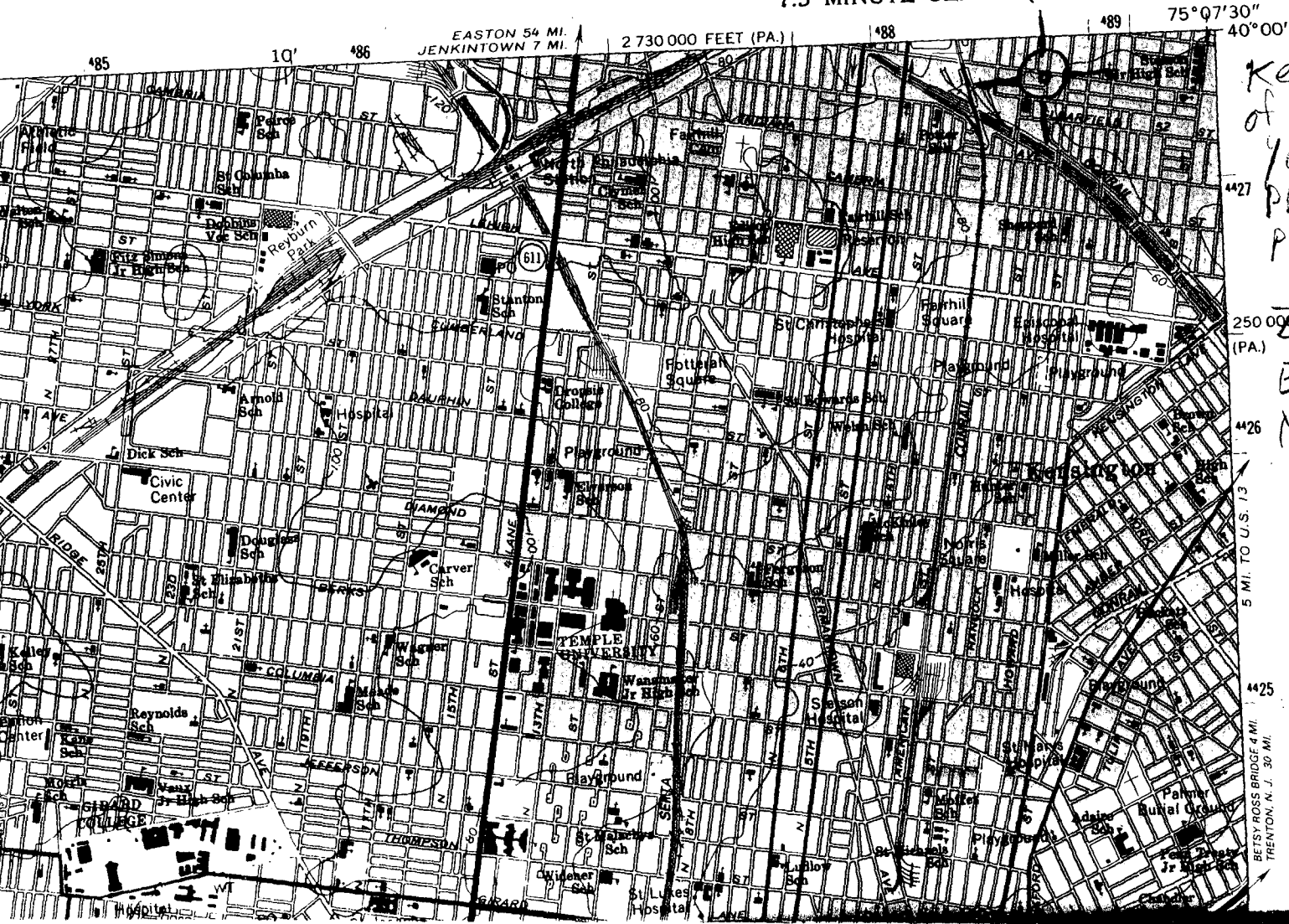
"Historical Background Kensington Branch," ms. Philadelphia headquarters, 2027 Chestnut Street.

Sims, Mary. The Natural History of the YWCA of the U.S.A. New York, 1935.

Wilson, Elizabeth. Fifty Years of Association Work Among Young Women. New York, 1916.

PHILADELPHIA QUADRANGLE
PENNSYLVANIA-NEW JERSEY
7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)

5964 II SE
(FRANKFORD)



Kensington Branch
of Philadelphia
YWCA
Philadelphia
Philadelphia
Quad
Zone 18
E 488650
N 4427390

250 000 FEET
(PA.)
5 MI. TO U.S. 13
4425
BETSY ROSS BRIDGE 4 MI.
TRENTON, N. J. 30 MI.